DISCOVERY Planetary Mission Operations Concepts

Richard C. Coffin*  
Jet Propulsion Laboratory  
California Institute of Technology  
4800 Oak Grove Dr., Pasadena, California 91109

ABSTRACT

The NASA Discovery Program of small planetary missions will provide opportunities to conduct scientific exploration of the solar system in today's cost-constrained environment. A multidisciplinary team at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory is developing a plan to provide mission operations within the financial parameters established by the Discovery Program. I'his paper will describe experiences and methods that show promise of all low-cost, high-performance, low-risk, high-quality, and responsive mission operations.

Low-cost mission operations concepts will be surveyed, with an emphasis on low-cost strategies and experiences, used both at the Jet Propulsion Laboratory and at other institutions. The paper will identify the major factors that determine mission operations cost (mission complexity, spacecraft operability, risk policies, and ground operations efficiency); it will then suggest how these factors can be managed to moderate mission operations cost. A taxonomy of mission operations functions will be described and examples of several Discovery-class organizational approaches will be presented. The paper will also describe multi-mission ground system services that will allow low-cost Discovery missions to share tracking, data capture, command, and navigation support.

The Discovery Program will encourage the development of small, more focused, spacecraft. We in mission operations must respond with correspondingly small, efficient mission operations concepts and ground data systems.

*Mr. Coffin will be reporting for the JPL Discovery Operations Concept Team